

5+n CR related FAQs from the development team, faced by a BA

“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change.” – Charles Darwin

Most of the articles and experts on Business analysis usually consider the client perspective in detail. However, it is often an unnoticed reality that the Business Analyst has two very diverse stakeholder groups to persuade. Purely satisfying the business groups that are stakeholders will not help you to make your project victorious (even though their interests should get the top priority). The development team who must implement the solution should be considered as stakeholders as well, from the requirements perspective.

Furthermore, the people management skills and the communication effectiveness of a BA is even more crucial when the project is getting good number of CRs-Change Requests (*Please note that we are using the term CR all through this article to denote the change request related to requirements*). There will be a lot of questions and concerns from the development team aimed at the BA on each CR. Since the business analyst is responsible for the CRs and for establishing a synergy between the development team and the client, it is the BA who needs to “Convey & Convince” each and every aspect of a CR to the entire team. The BA will not be able to succeed here unless and until he/she clearly understand and address these questions: **What are the questions asked of the BA? How can a BA be prepared to face such questions? What are the best ways to address these questions on CR from the development team?**

This article looks at these questions and the possible ways to answer such questions. There are a few real-life examples along with the answers which will help you to get a realistic standpoint on each of the areas. (*Please note that some details of these examples have been modified appropriately to protect the confidentiality of the source.*)

The FIVE Questions

So let us see the top 5 questions on a typical CR, darted at the BA –of course by the development team.

Question #1 → “What is the exact Change in requirement here?”-

Compare- The technical team will always have the ‘nostalgic’ (☺) memory of the outdated requirement. So it is your responsibility as a BA to focus on the exact difference between the outdated requirement and the new change in that requirement. As we all know the best way to avoid ‘confusion’ is ‘comparison’. So always explain to them by comparing the Pre-CR requirement with Post CR requirement hence directly pin pointing to the change in requirement. *Let us see one example now on this area. (Please note that this scenario mentioned below is more aligned to systems requirement part, than business requirements.)*

A few months back, a friend of mine and his team received a simple (seems to be ☺) CR on a particular flag value in the database. As per the CR, the flag value should be RESET if a particular criterion is met and there was another system which will retrieve this value to check whether the condition is met or not. The problem was funny yet simple... The requirement didn’t say whether that value should be reset as “0” or “NULL” while the

condition for reset is met!!! So the technical team of flag-update module used "0" to reset and the team behind flag-check program used "NULL" for verifying the reset condition.

*Now you may be wondering what is so critical about this simple CR related to a single flag value. Interestingly the flag value indicated whether the user of an internet site, wishes to subscribe to regular email notifications. The flag-updating program was linked to a heavy traffic public corporate web site and the flag value was set or reset through this site (based on user's choice on receiving email notifications from the site). On the other hand the flag retrieving application used to take the list of users who opted for email notification and send frequent emails to them. Fortunately the team identified the issue while testing and prevented the consequences. So obviously due to this CR miscommunication, **millions of users might have received email notifications which they actually opted out of.***

So the BA needs to ensure that the team is clear on the exact change in requirement.

Question #2 → Why do we need this change in requirement?

Convince –This is the area where most of the BAs won't pay enough attention. You should not just 'convey', but you should 'convince' the technical team on the CR. You need to clearly explain to them the business impact of this particular change (quantify if possible). Also, you may need to tell them the direct or indirect value-add the team is going to get through this CR (if any). Always keep in mind that a CR is always a headache for the development team and you should never expect them to welcome a CR. So be prepared with a sales pitch on each CR here ☺. Now let us move on to another example.

The IT department of a US healthcare giant once submitted a CR to improve the page caching for their public website (Caching=temporary storage). Since the application was caching enabled, the information entered by the user used to be retained in the page even if the page is refreshed accidentally (so that the user need not re-enter the details). However, there was one drop-down list in one of the pages, which was not caching enabled. Hence whenever the page gets refreshed all the fields used to get reloaded, but this drop-down list entry used to reset to the very first value in the list. So the client wanted to solve this issue and ensure that the value selected by the end user will be retained in the drop down list even after the page refresh. Surprisingly this particular CR came in high priority category which required immediate attention. The technical team was wondering why this CR is of high priority. (I am sure you will also have the same question in your mind. ☺)

This particular drop down list was in the "Contact US" page through which any users can contact the organization with their complaints and issues. The dropdown list had different categories of issues which the user can select. But most of the time when the page refreshed, the users didn't notice the fact that this drop down list value changed. (The user thought since all other fields on the page remained as it was that the list did not change either.) Each category in the drop down list had a dedicated department to address the corresponding issue in that category. So due to this caching issue in the application, most of the complaints were going to the wrong department (The unlucky

*dept -which was assigned to address issues in the very first category mentioned in the drop down list.) So the head of the star-crossed dept started getting warnings from the top management on his team's poor performance and **practically the whole department went into trouble just because of a caching issue with a drop down list of a single page** 😊*

So the BA needs to ensure that the team is clear on the reason behind the requirement change.

Question #3 → When will we get the finalized requirement?

Confidence – This is the danger zone for a BA. The moment the development team encounters a CR, they will lose the confidence in the BA and also on the stability of the requirements. Now they will have an apprehension that the change may get changed again or even rolled back. So you need to make the team confident that the change happened right now is an exception and may not happen so frequently in future. This is the area where you should try to build credibility for yourself as a BA and the requirement management process as a whole.

*An American retail client was maintaining an e-commerce site through which the end user can purchase their products. The client came up with a CR on a feature to search and shop related third party products which are provided by multiple vendors. So the user need not navigate to third party sites to get the details of such products and place the order. The client decided to provide an integrated experience to the user by providing all the necessary details in their parent site itself without navigating to the third party vendor sites. They rolled back this CR after some time since a few of the vendors didn't have the technical expertise to provide such integrated experience. After a few weeks the client re-submitted this CR , but only for a single line of business which was apparels industry since they realized that all their third party apparel vendors can provide this feature on time. After a few days the client had to withdraw the CR again since one of their third party apparel vendors couldn't complete the technical work within the given time lines. By this time **the development team was frustrated and they would not agree to work on the CR until they got a confirmation.***

Question #4 → Where will we get the exact requirements?

Collaborate – Ensure that you have a centralized repository for the CRs where anyone within the team can come and see the complete details of the CR. Moreover make certain that everybody is aware about this repository and also make it a practice to keep this repository UP-TO-DATE. This may seem to be childish, but this is the major reason behind the communication gap which may arise between the BA and Dev team.

An IT vendor working for a US financial services firm was developing a multipurpose portal for their end users to manage their financial details. The application had one module for their tax processing as well. As per the requirement the pages should look like the different IRS forms (US Tax return forms). There was a CR to update a few pages in the application based on a new form published by IRS. The CR had a link to a common windows team folder where the form samples for reference were stored. After a few

*weeks the whole project migrated to Microsoft SharePoint technology and all the documents were also migrated. However the project team forgot to remove the outdated project folder even though they were using SharePoint space. In the meanwhile the form template underwent a few changes and the team kept the SharePoint space updated with the latest forms. In between one of the team members who went for a long leave came back after his vacation and developed a module completely. But then the team realized that this team member was referring to the old windows folder and obviously the outdated form template. This was a legal mandate and fortunately the team was able to identify the problem well in advance. If this had not been caught the organization might have had **to wait until the next financial year to roll out** this application just because of the fact that they didn't update a team member about the SharePoint location!!!*

Question #5 → Who suggested/reviewed/approved this change?

Communicate – Always be democratic when you communicate the details of a CR. Usually the BAs themselves will select/filter the audience when they communicate about a CR. This seems to be a danger since the BA may not be the right person to decide who all can be impacted because of this CR. So let this communication be a 'broadcast' so that you can ensure that you didn't miss anybody. 😊

*A few years back an IT vendor was developing an application suite for one of the European retail giants. The application system was for printing the stickers and posters of different offers and discounts to be pasted in their retail super market chains. So there were multiple sub-applications under the same suite such as...one to generate such discount offers based on the business rules, one to process the discounts and generate stickers/posters, another one which will act as a printing application and also the corresponding hardware. The stickers were single color and supposed to take print outs in colored sheets. The business team came up with a CR to introduce Color Printing realizing the fact that color printing is cheaper than color paper. The CR went to all teams and all teams worked as per the CR except one team, which was the printing software team. In fact the BA assumed that the stickers will be generated in color by the image generation software and the hardware is reconfigured with color printers and hence there is no changes needed in the printing software. (Conceptually the printing software is just collecting the images generated by the poster generation software and sending it to an appropriate printer). But the BA forgot the fact that the printing software need to have system level interfacing with the printing hardware and since the printer configuration changed from non color to color, the printer software had to be re-written. Just because the BA excluded one group from the communication, based on a wrong assumption, **the project slipped its budget and schedule.***

The “Nth” Question

Now let us see the Nth question and also see why it is NOT the 6th question!!!

1. **How** will we do this Change requirement?

This is the obviously the toughest question, which is completely 'out of context'!!! This question is different than the five questions explained on top because...

1. Even though they asked this question verbally, they mean something else
2. BAs are not responsible for this question, still this will be mostly aimed at BA

So the team is actually trying to ask some other question and since they are not able to put it across clearly, they are simply asking “How will we do this”. So when you get this question you should use your elicitation techniques and collect more details about this question. Then you will realize that even though they asked this question they wanted to ask something else. Please see two examples given here.

- a) Can we do like this?

By asking –How will we do this- they may be trying to tell you that the current approach is not the best one and they want to suggest an alternative approach. In such cases you should ensure that you are communicating the same to the stakeholders and you should show a green signal to the development team only when the stakeholders approve the alternate approach.

- b) Will we get more time since there is re-work involved here?

By asking –How will we do this- they may be trying express their concern that the effort involved in implementing this CR is more. In this context ideally you should have an answer ready with you for this question. The moment you get a CR, you should check with the stakeholders on timelines. So you should be able to explain the overall execution plan for the CR.

The obvious message here is to be prepared to address the project team’s questions and concerns about the (inevitable) change requests that may come. Most of the time, the developers also play a critical role to help arrive at an optimal solution and contribute to estimating the time and cost to implement the CR. For these reasons the entire team should be seen as partners in the change management process and that it will help them build a better product.

I would like to conclude with a slightly crazy yet meaningful message!!! In an ideal scenario you should never be in a position to face such questions. Don’t get it wrong and let me make it clear 😊. This means the BA should never wait until the development team comes up with these questions. Rather she/he should proactively present all this information to them as and when these details are available.

But we know that we are not living in Utopia and this situation may not happen always. However the message here is plain and simple.

“The more you get any of these questions, the more you should re-visit your change management approach!!!”